

CARSS PARK Community Garden

GARDENERS guidebook

September 2008



**Produced as a preliminary guide for the
Carss Park Community Gardeners.**

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Site of the proposed Carss Park Community Garden — the disused Carss Park Bowling Club. August 2008.

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Gardening for the benefit of all...

Introduction



Participants at the Carss Park Community Garden first planning day in August 2008.

The purpose of this community garden guide is to:

- **provide information** for the harmonious use of the community garden site by members of the community garden
- **minimise the risk to the health** of members and visitors to the community garden
- **minimise the risk of environmental damage** as a result of the management of the community garden
- **encourage informed and scientific management** of the garden for the production of food and other plants
- **encourage a cooperative and positive relationship** between community gardeners and Kogarah Municipal Council
- **establish the community garden as a citizen-managed** public asset and to improve public amenity in the local government area
- **facilitate community enterprise** in access to locally produced food, recreation, developing a place for informal social interaction and a place in which citizens can address global trends at the local level.

Community gardening provides the opportunity for citizens to produce some of the food they eat using gardening methods they approve of.

Community gardens are more than this, however. When properly operated they become places where people can meet informally, giving them a valuable social role in our suburbs.

They are also places that non-members might like to visit to view the plants and to sit quietly in.

Community gardens are also places for learning... about plants, food, soils, using water responsibly... and about each other. Importantly, they can help to form positive and constructive relationships with local government.

Achieving all of this requires members of the community garden to cooperate in planning the garden and what is grown, to solve problems in a friendly and constructive manner and to make decisions for the common good of all gardeners and of the local area.

This is not difficult and it is the reason for this little guidebook.

Amendments may be needed over time

This guidebook was produced as part of a package of documents for Kogarah Municipal Council and for the first group of community gardeners. The package consisted of this manual, a policy directions document for council and a model gardener's agreement or charter. This was intended to form a starters kit to enable the community gardeners to make a start as soon as possible.

As the community garden develops, it might become necessary to amend some of the ideas in this manual. That may come about because circumstances change and because new opportunities become apparent.

This should be done after thoroughly discussing the positive, negative and other potentials of the proposed changes. It is important that as many people as practical agree to any changes. It might also show consideration to invite council to form an opinion on proposed changes.



Managing our community garden...

Governance



The management of the community garden is based on the following principles that are enacted through management structures:

- **democratic procedure** through which topics are deliberated as a means of decision making
- **participation** by all members interested in being involved
- **fairness and due process** (defined as fair treatment in regard to process).

Management team

Governance of the garden is through a management team elected at the annual general meeting of members.

The make up of the team will be determined by members, however it should include roles such as:

- **a secretary/communications person** to be responsible for communications internally and external to the garden membership
- **a treasurer** responsible for managing garden funds
- **a public officer** responsible for legal affairs such as reporting in the situation that the gardeners form an incorporated association
- **a liaison person** to communicate with Kogarah Municipal Council

Incorporation as a community association will necessitate additional roles.

A staff member from Kogarah Municipal Council or person appointed to represent Council on the Management Team.

Meetings

The management team will meet quarterly or as decided by members. The purpose of the meetings will be to monitor the operation of the garden, discuss difficulties, receive reports from the Management Team, make decisions and discuss ideas for the garden.

Additional meetings may be called and as required and provision for an extraordinary general meeting is recommended to address critical issues.

The management team report to the quarterly (or at other times as decided by members) meeting of garden members.

Member meetings

An annual general meeting shall be organised at a timing determined by the requirements of members or the incorporated association status.

The purpose will be to review the year past, to formulate and change policy, elect office holders and discuss ideas for the coming year.



Participants display ideas for community garden at first on-site planning day,
9 August 2008

Council participation

It is recommended that Kogarah Municipal Council appoint a person to liaise with the community garden management team and that this person sit on the management team.

The appointee should be familiar with community gardening, the motivations of the Carss Park gardeners and the limitations, barriers and opportunities facing community based organisations.



Community participation day, August 2008.

Council staff working with community gardens to assess the site. Centre left, Fiona Stock, Kogarah Council's Waste Services Manager.

Gardener agreement

An agreement covering expectations about the behaviour and conduct of gardeners on site, access to and management of shared garden areas and allotments has been provided as part of the start-up kit for the community garden on the site of the disused Carss Park bowling club.

Intention to comply with the conditions in the gardeners' charter or agreement is acknowledged when new members sign on.

This signifies their willing compliance with its provisions. It also outlines a process of conflict resolution that members agree to follow.

The agreement should be given to prospective gardeners prior to their becoming members so that they have sufficient opportunity to decide whether they are prepared to abide by its provisions.

The charter or agreement may require amendment from time to time. This should be done in a deliberative and open manner and the changes agreed to by members according to their decision making process.



Community participation; gardeners working on site design August 2008.

Resolving conflict in the garden

Where people attempt to cooperate in some endeavour such as community gardening, interpersonal conflict is possible because people's differing life experiences, beliefs, attitudes and learnings influence how they think and react to things.

The purpose of the gardener's agreement or charter, which is a separate document to this community gardening guidebook, is to suggest ways to minimise conflict and permit constructive decisions to be negotiated in the interest of all gardeners.

It sets out standards of conduct expected of gardeners so that the experience of gardening is personally fulfilling and so that the shared experience is harmonious.

It is recommended that the agreement or charter be shown to prospective gardeners before they sign on as members, so that they have time to consider whether they are prepared to comply with its requirements.

Our approach to gardening...

Site management

A simple ethic

An ethic of...

- caring for people
- caring for nature
- sharing our surplus

...underlies our participation in the community garden and its management.



These ethics come from the permaculture system of sustainability design.

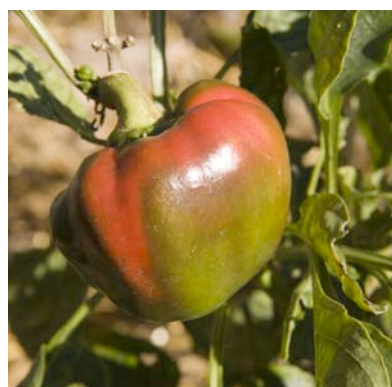
As responsible citizens of the Kogarah local government area and nearby areas, we make use of ecologically and socially sustainable gardening processes for the design, operations and management of the community garden.

This is reflected in our choice of organic gardening methods, our use of resources such as soils and water, our production of edible plants that have high nutritional value and in the interpersonal relations we develop between gardeners.

Gardening method

The community garden is managed according to the principles of organic gardening.

This decision is based on the observation that organic gardening techniques are generally safer than the use of many synthetic gardening products.



Reducing risk

Organic gardening methods reduce risk to ourselves, our garden and our environment.

Organic methods:

- **reduce the risk to gardener health** through the inappropriate use of synthetic gardening inputs such as pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers
- **reduce the risk of unintentionally contaminating** nearby waterways (such as the canal near the community garden) with contaminated runoff
- **reduce the risk of contaminating garden soils** with synthetic chemicals.

Some people prefer to use organic methods because synthetic pesticides and herbicides might remain on vegetables, herbs and fruit that have not been thoroughly washed.

Another reason to use organic gardening is that it is knowledge intensive. Rather than simply spraying synthetic chemicals, the use of organic techniques necessitates learning about plants, insects and soils, improving the knowledge and skills of gardeners.

Use of water

In accordance with best practice community gardening, we use water conservatively so as to minimise its consumption.

This is achieved through:

- **the creation of soils rich in organic matter** and, therefore, capable of retaining soil moisture in the vicinity of plant roots
- **the harvesting and storage of rainwater** on-site for use in the garden; this might include rainwater tanks, small scale earthworks and other approaches
- **the use of water conserving irrigation**, such as hand held hoses and watering cans
- **the use of mulch** on garden beds to reduce the evapotranspiration of soil moisture and reduce the need for irrigation.





Production of compost and other inputs

We use compost as a garden fertiliser to provide our plants with the nutrients they need to grow strong and healthy and to improve the moisture retention capacity of our garden soils.

Compost is produced on-site from garden and household green wastes. In doing this, we reduce the amount of waste we send to landfill.

Compost-enriched soils also capture more carbon, enabling community gardens to play a role in ameliorating global warming.

Production of planting material

It is recommended that gardeners acquire skills in plant propagation and planting out to:

- **reduce** their reliance on purchased seed
- **improve** their knowledge and skills
- **increase** their self-reliance.

It is recommended that gardeners obtain a supply of non-hybrid seeds to enable the development of these skills and that they grow and collect seed and cuttings from these plants for the propagation of more plants.



Jude Fanton from the Seed Savers Network (www.seedsavers.net) teaching children how to save seeds.

Structures

Constructions on site, such as a shelter pergola, shelter for the plant propagation area and water tank are necessary to the effective functioning of the community garden.

From time to time, the need for additional minor structures may become apparent.

Where the knowledge does not exist within the garden membership, gardeners are to seek technical advice as to the design, construction and safety of structures.

Assisting maintenance of common gardens

Allotment holders are required to assist in the maintenance and development of the shared garden areas and of infrastructure in the garden.

The time requirement for doing this is to be determined by the gardeners and Management Team.

Management of allotments

- allotment holders are responsible for the maintenance of their allotment and the area immediately surrounding
- allotments may be held continually providing they are maintained and cultivated
- the period for retaining an allotment while it is in disuse (such as when going away for holidays or for other reasons) is to be determined by garden management; allotment holders are to advise management when they wish to relinquish their allotment so it can be passed to the next on the waiting list
- allotments are to be maintained in a tidy and safe condition
- community garden management may choose to charge an allotment fee additional to the community garden membership fee
- allotment holders are not to obstruct paths by storing materials on them; materials, such as unused trellises being stored temporarily, should be stored neatly at one end of the allotment or in a storage area elsewhere in the garden
- allotments are not to be fenced
- in addition to vegetables and herbs, allotment holders may grow plants of their choice, including flowers, that are within the height limit for allotment cultivation and that are agreeable to the community garden membership
- climbing plants such as beans and tomato are best grown on a trellis no higher than two metres so as not to cast shade on neighbouring allotments
- only vegetables, herbs and low-growing fruit shrubs are to be grown in allotments; taller fruits, trees and shrubs are best grown in an orchard area designed specifically for this purpose; water crop gardens are best located in shared areas
- gardeners have responsibility for improving the condition of soils within their allotment

- a waiting list for allotments shall be maintained when all allotments have been allocated
- gardeners have access to only one allotment unless there is space to spare; when this is the case, the extra allotment must be passed on at the end of the growing season to anyone placed on the waiting list; gardeners wanting gardening space in addition to their allotment should be encouraged to participate in managing the communal (shared) beds
- allotment holders are expected to participate in the management of shared areas; the scale of participation in shared gardening will be determined by the community garden management and membership.

Managing shared garden areas

Shared, or communal, garden areas are grounds within the community garden that are not allocated to personal cultivation in the form of allotments or personal fruit tree areas.

Allotment holders are expected to participate in the maintenance and development of shared areas. Some gardeners may want to participate only in shared gardening and forego the opportunity for an allotment.

- decisions on the plant species selected for cultivation in the shared garden areas should be made by the membership team, first obtaining technical advice if necessary; in general, these could be fruit trees and shrubs, nut trees, leguminous trees to produce the plant nutrient, nitrogen, for the garden and ground covers
- in planning shared garden plantings, consideration should be given to the potential of mature trees to cast shade onto allotments and into neighbouring properties; placing trees to the southern aspect of the community garden should reduce this possibility



Our gardening skills...

Gardener training

Skilful gardening requires that we train ourselves in gardening techniques.

This can be done through workshops. The aim of training is to ensure gardeners have a minimum set of compatible skills that are compatible with the approach to gardening adopted by the gardeners.

Workshops need be of only short duration and may be scheduled at times determined as appropriate by the gardeners.

Kogarah Municipal Council may at times provide training in the community garden to the gardeners and to other people in the area. Gardeners may also organise their own training workshops. There may be sufficient experience and knowledge among the gardeners to do this. A skills audit will disclose who possesses the ability to offer training.

A suggested composition for an introductory workshop series would include:

- **gardening safety** — this is a basic skill that all gardeners should acquire within reasonable time of joining the community garden
- **introduction to the design of the community garden** — this explains the logic of the garden design in relation to site conditions such as soils, sun and shade patterns, winds and water supply; the reasons for the requirement for allotment holders to assist in the shared garden areas also forms a part of this training
- **making compost** — if compost is to be the main fertiliser used in the community garden, then learning a simple method to make it is a basic skill that is best acquired soon after people join the community garden
- **making and maintaining a no-dig, mulched garden** — this is another basic skill that is needed by new gardeners soon after joining so that they can start to garden effectively
- **propagating plants from seeds and cuttings**— this is not necessarily a skill that is needed immediately upon joining the community garden; it can be acquired later.

These skills may be passed on via formal workshops, through the formation of gardening teams that include an experienced gardener or informally, through working with experienced gardeners.

Safety in the garden...

Keeping the garden safe

Our community garden must be maintained in a condition conducive to its safe use by gardeners and to visits by non-gardeners.

One way to ensure that new gardeners acquire this information may be for it to be included as an introductory workshop.

Garden safety is very much about common sense and thinking about what we do.

Garden safety is simple

Tool Use

1. If you are taking more than one or two tools into the garden, carry them from storage into the garden in a wheelbarrow, bucket or a basket so there is a predetermined place to put them when they are not in use and at the end of the gardening session.
2. Before using a spade, garden fork, rake or other long handled tool, look to make sure there is nobody behind or beside you so that you don't hit them with the tool.
3. When you have finished using a garden tool or you put a tool aside for a moment, place it out of the way of people.
4. Never lay a tool across a path or place it in long grass where it is hidden and where people could trip over it.
5. Lean a garden rake or long handled tool against something when you put it aside. If you have to lay it down, place it away from where people might walk. Place it with the pointed tangs or blade on the ground, not pointing up.
6. When putting a garden spade, shovel or fork aside, push it into the soil so that it remains upright and visible.
7. Carry tools such as spades, garden forks and rakes in your hand rather than over the shoulder. Carried on the shoulder, it is easy to hit someone accidentally if you turn around and they are close by.

Avoid sunburn and dehydration

1. Wear a hat to avoid sunburn.
2. If you sunburn easily, consider wearing a lightweight shirt with long sleeves as well as long trousers.
3. Use a sunscreen cream to avoid sunburn.
4. If in the garden for some time, remember to drink water to avoid dehydration.

Care with creatures

1. Do not try to pick up bugs, spiders and other creatures you come across. They might defend themselves by biting, stinging or scratching.
2. Look before lifting buckets, watering cans, boxes and other things. Redback spiders sometimes nest in them and a bite can be dangerous.
3. If gardening near bushland, do not interfere with any snakes or goannas you see in the garden.

Lifting

1. When lifting something heavy, bend your knees and crouch down, then lift it by straightening your legs.
2. To avoid back injury, do not bend over to pick up something that is heavy.

Storage

1. Designate an area of the garden for storing materials.
2. Store materials so that they are unlikely to fall over or spill. Place heavier materials close to the ground and lighter materials on top of these.
3. Stack and store materials neatly so that they are easily accessible and out of the way of paths and places where people walk.
4. Avoid storing materials that the gardeners have no plans to use. This avoids community gardens becoming eyesores.

Caring for children

1. If children are to visit or participate in the garden, avoid planting toxic plants and remove species (such as castor oil bush and oleander) that are toxic to children. Consider what might be a danger to children even if it is not dangerous to adults. It might be an idea to label hot-tasting plants such as chilli with visual and word warnings.
2. If growing water crops (such as water chestnut, arrowhead or watercress) in a container or pond, consider covering it with a barrier (weldmesh, for example) that prevents children falling in but lets the plants grow through.
3. Keep a watch on young children in case they wander off-site.

Construction

1. When planning to build structures, obtain advice on design and construction, if that is unavailable among gardeners, so as the structure is sturdy and safe.
2. Keep paths clear and level.

3. Make garden bed edges strong so that they will not collapse. Avoid edging garden beds with sharp or pointed materials.
4. If digging a hole, make your work visible to gardeners passing by so they do not trip in it. Mark the excavation with coloured tape or a barrier if you are leaving it for a while.

Care with organic chemicals

1. The manufacture of organic controls for garden pest and plant disease management (sometimes called 'botanic' controls because they are derived from plants) should be done under the guidance of a gardener or adviser who has experience and is knowledgeable of the precautions to be taken in production, handling and application.
2. Some organic pesticides can cause injury. When making, handling and applying chilli-based insecticides such as chilli spray, wear gloves and keep hands away from your face (chilli in the eyes is painful).
3. Avoid getting botanic sprays and other controls in your eyes or in cuts on your hands or legs. It is best to wear gloves when applying any botanic or synthetic control.
4. Wash your hands after making, handling or applying organic pesticides, herbicides or other organic controls.



Other protective precautions

1. If you suffer breathing difficulties or asthma, consider wearing a dust mask when making or turning compost or spreading mulch.
2. Consider wearing gardening gloves to protect your hands and to avoid blisters from handling garden tools, and when doing garden construction and spreading compost and mulch.
3. Wear enclosed shoes to protect your feet. Do not garden in sandals.
5. Cover standing water, such as in a pond, to reduce the incidence of mosquito breeding. Water plants such as azolla and duckweed reduce the surface area available to mosquitoes. Species of small native fish that eat mosquito wrigglers can be introduced.